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**I feel Moroccan, I feel Italian, and I feel Muslim: Second generation Moroccans and identity negotiation between religion and community belonging**

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## I feel Moroccan, I feel Italian, and I feel Muslim: second generation Moroccans and identity negotiation between religion and community belonging --Manuscript Draft--

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<b>Abstract:</b>	Second generation immigrants in Western societies negotiate between cultural sets: the inherited and the acquired culture. For second generation <del>(2G)</del> Muslims the negotiation involves personal dimensions such as identity and it deals with the assimilative pressures of the society where they have grown up: a context where their ethnic and religious identities are combined and mixed. From an ecological perspective, these processes happen in the communities where everyday life and cultural transmission take place. This study examines from an ecological perspective the negotiation of identity in young adult Muslim 2G, how their ethnic, national, and religious ties are intertwined with the pressures from the community they perceive as the most important. We started from the community that the participants felt was most important for them and explored the different ways in which their religious, ethnic, and national identities were related to their most important community. Twenty young adult Moroccans settled in Italy since age 6 years were involved in semi-structured in-person interviews. The interview responses highlighted how complex these individuals find managing their ethnic and religious identities and how this process is related to their conception of religiosity and the forms it takes in everyday life (e.g., a system of values vs. a set of practices).
<b>Suggested Reviewers:</b>	Terri Mannarini terri.mannarini@unisalento.it for her studies in community psychology and her qualitative approach to research  Anne BRODSKY brodsky@umbc.edu for her studies in community psychology and her qualitative approach to research  Vassilis Saroglou vassilis.saroglou@uclouvain.be for his studies in the psychology of religion and on the adaptation of second generations
<b>Response to Reviewers:</b>	As requested, we have replaced abbreviations with full definitions and submitted the manuscript for further linguistic revision. In text, revisions relating to the grammar and writing style issues have been highlighted in yellow.

I feel Moroccan, I feel Italian, and I feel Muslim: second generation Moroccans and identity negotiation between religion and community belonging

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## **I feel Moroccan, I feel Italian, and I feel Muslim: second generation Moroccans and identity negotiation between religion and community belonging**

### **Introduction**

Italy has a relatively recent history of immigration, with immigrant waves beginning in the 1990s. Contrary to the political ~~hawking~~ of immigrant invasion, the immigrant population currently accounts for 8.9% of the total population, 69.8% of which are extra-European Union nationals (Italian National Institute of Statistics [ISTAT], 2018). Moroccans make up the oldest and the largest community: 70.3% have a long-term residence permit (Ministry of Work and Social Welfare, 2018). From a sociodemographic perspective, long-term presence implies that a **second generation** grew up and attended school in Italy. Immigrant population statistics for Italy ~~show~~ that of the 416,531 Moroccans legally residing in the country 27.4% are minors and 40.6% are under age 30 years (Ministry of Work and Social Welfare, 2018). This means that Moroccan **second generation** accounts for a consistent part of the young population in Italy both ~~today and tomorrow~~. Defining ~~second~~ generation of migration is more difficult than it may seem. Whereas children born in the receiving country can generally be considered as second generation, foreign-born children and adolescents, or children born to one foreign-born parent and one native-born parent ~~are~~ are less easily classified. In 1997 ~~Rumbaut~~ advanced a more nuanced concept of generation 1.5: migrant children aged 6-12 years who began their socialisation in the home country but completed it in the receiving country (see also Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The rationale for this classification postulates that a sort of continuum exists along which sociocultural contexts and educational problems differ between individuals born in the host country and those who arrived in adulthood after being socialized in their country of origin. This concept of second generation may be understood as a superordinate classification. Besides generation 1.5, the scheme distinguishes generation 1.25 (adolescents who migrated at age 13-17 years) and generation 1.75 (pre-school children who migrated at age 0-6 years) (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut 1997). According to Rumbaut (2004; p. 1167), generation 1.75 is “almost entirely socialized in the destination country and most similar to the native-born”, so that it is possible to refer to them as **second generation** (see also Creese, 2019; van Ours & Veenman, 2003; Fernández-Reino & González-Ferrer, 2019). A better understanding of how ~~second~~ generation defines itself is relevant for understanding how certain features of Italian society will evolve locally over the next few years. For this reason, it is important to gain a theoretical perspective on how different – and sometimes distant – cultural elements intertwine to shape individual identities.

Differently from their parents who grew up outside Italian culture and then had to adapt after migration, young Muslim **second generation** have largely grown up in a cultural mix of ethnic differences, social networks, bilingualism, and transnationalism that manifest in multiple ways (Buckingham & Brodsky, 2015). Among the many elements composing this cultural mosaic, the religious dimension holds a preeminent place.

Religion is by itself a marker of group belonging and identification (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). For a variety of sociocultural factors, the analysis of which is beyond the scope of the present study, religious borders are particularly critical when the religion at stake is Islam. Being a Muslim in a European country means not only belonging to a minority religion but also having to confront distrust and hostility (Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2012). Since the 1990s, and after the September 11 terrorist attacks in particular, “a set of policies, practices, and discourses hostile to Muslim immigration started to spread, leading to the development of an actual system of Islamophobia” in Europe (Perocco, 2018, p. 28). This form of evident racism has structured the growing nationalisms in Europe (Traverso, 2017) and constitutes a driver of the social marginalization of Muslim minorities (Perocco, 2018). A key theme in Islamophobic discourse is the purported unbridgeable cultural and religious gap in minority-majority relations (“the impossible integration”). Among Muslims, this has led to “crystallisation into a deprived religious minority” (Perocco, 2018, p. 28). **Among non-Muslims**, the perception of such an “irreducible difference”, **also related to the female condition**, **is a reason** to exert assimilative pressure on younger Muslim generations to relinquish their cultural traditions **and** to “adapt” to the Western context (Kunst & Sam, 2014).

Social psychologists have underlined the link between religion and acculturation (e.g., Friedman & Saroglou, 2010; Güngör, Fleischmann, & Phalet, 2011). Muslim youths who have grown up as second generation generally prefer maintaining their culture of origin and are less apt to identify with the national group (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). A study involving young Muslim immigrants in Belgium found that the perception of a cultural gap between their heritage and Western culture mediated the relationship between psychological acculturation and religiosity (Friedman & Saroglou, 2010). This finding sheds light on the negotiation that Muslim immigrants face if they want to create a place for their cultural heritage system within secularized Western society (Saroglou & Mathijssen, 2007). Negotiation involves multiple personal dimensions including identity (Sartawi & Sammut, 2012) and works under the assimilative pressures from a plural society. Moreover, like other **second generation**, young Moroccans are pressured by their family and ethnic community to assure cross-generational transmission of their cultural heritage, which in

the Moroccan community often overlaps with religious beliefs and traditions (e.g., Güngör et al. 2011; Maliepaard & Lubbers, 2013).

From an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), these processes take place in communities where people are involved. According to this approach, people are constantly involved in a transactional relationship with their physical, social, and cultural environment and are engaged in an interactive process of mutual reciprocity and complementary exchange of resources (Siporin, 1980; Mannarini, Rochira, & Talò, 2012). Communities are the space where everyday life unfolds and culture is transmitted from generation to generation (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). It is in this sense that communities can be understood as relational spaces where the complex dynamic of multicultural contacts take place (Buckingham et al., 2018; Prilleltensky, 2008). The literature reports that people usually belong to several relational communities (Brotsky & Marx, 2001) to which they attribute different degrees of emotional relevance coherent with their self-identification. Among an individual's communities of belonging, there may be one subjectively defined as being the most important one since it provides an anchor for the development of the individual's and the group's identities (Mannarini & Rochira, 2014).

Studies have investigated how second generation negotiate their ethnic and national identities (e.g., Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007; Ali & Sonn, 2010) and how important belonging to a community is for them (e.g., Fedi et al., 2019; Mannarini & Rochira, 2014). To the best of our knowledge, few studies have examined the relationships between community belonging and identity negotiation (Barbieri, Zani, & Sonn, 2014; Buckingham et al., 2018) and none have focused on the role that religion plays in this context. The present study fills this gap by examining in a sample of young adult Muslim Moroccans who grew up in Italy the relationships between the characteristics of the community they felt was most important for them and the way they defined their identity along contours of ethnic, national, and religious belonging.

### **Community, identity, and religion**

The relationships between community and identity are well captured in the Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1981) frame, which underlines how social identity is shaped by group belonging. Social identity is a part of an individual's self-concept and derives from one's perceived membership in relevant social groups. As previous studies have noted (Gattino, Tartaglia, Rollero & De Piccoli, 2019; Mannarini et al., 2012; Mannarini, Talò & Rochira, 2017), identifying with a community as with a group gives rise to the social component of one's identity and contributes to one's self-esteem and positive self-image. This implies that people attribute to their communities meanings that are strongly related to the idea of their belonging to such communities and this is

particularly true for the community that individuals subjectively identify as the most relevant ~~one~~ in their lives. Because communities provide individuals with identities, social roles, values, norms, stories, myths, and sense of historical continuity, they are pivotal for socialization and psychological development (e.g., Mankowski & Rappaport, 1995). As Cohen (1985, p. 118) argued, “people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning and a referent of their identity”.

Moreover, communities are embedded in broader social contexts shaped by multiple cultural instances related to ethnicity, nationality, and religion. As a form of culture (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011), religion contributes to the formation of an individual’s identity and serves as an anchor, helping individuals to preserve their self-awareness and feelings of cohesion with their group (Duderija, 2007). Religion becomes even more relevant as an identity marker when the confessed faith is a minority in the social context, as is Islam in the Western world. The rise of Islam as an identity marker is partially related to the way believers are instructed to practice it (Gattino, Miglietta, Rizzo, & Testa, 2016). Perhaps more than other religions, Islam sets the rules for daily life practices and social interactions. In the Arab countries where the majority of Muslims residing in the EU ~~originally came from~~, Islamic culture deeply permeates both public and private life, creating an overlap of national and religious identification. This overlap powerfully shapes shared social realities “through similarity (e.g., religious dress codes) and synchronicity (e.g., daily prayers or breaking the fast)” (Güngör et al., 2011, p. 1357).

The meaning-making and world-making functions Islam exerts on its followers ~~does~~ not always fit well with the cultural traditions of the Western Christian world where many **second generation** Muslim have grown up and now live. We agree with Ammermann’s (2003) statements that **second generation** ~~and next generations~~ likely experience a “clash of cultures” that could result in developing their own relationships between ethnic and religious traditions (see also Duderija, 2007). In today’s Western countries, this “clash” is further exacerbated by anti-Islamic stereotyping (Kunst et al., 2012; Perocco, 2018). In Italy, too, there has been a recent rise in xenophobic, anti-Muslim rhetoric in political discourse, the social media, and the mass media (Alietti & Padovan, 2018).

Muslim **second generation** manage these identity elements in multiple ways, sometimes relying on religion to guide these processes (e.g., Peek, 2005; Sartawi & Sammut, 2012; Schmidt, 2004; van Heelsum & Koomen, 2016). Studies from Western receiving countries ~~show~~ how identity management can result in a plurality of outcomes. According to the paradigm of secularization and assimilation of immigrant generations (Sheikh, 2007), Muslim **second generation** should be less religious than the first generation and more likely to **reject** an Islamic identity because they have grown up in a predominantly secular environment (Maliepaard, Gijsberts, & Lubbers, 2012). Recent

studies, however, have found relatively high levels of religious involvement in **second generation** Muslims because of parental transmission of religious practices during childhood (Güngör et al., 2011). This observation has led to the formulation of the “religious vitality” hypothesis (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2012) that conceptualizes the construction of **second generation** Islamic identity in terms of practices and respect for traditions. Beyond the religiosity continuum, studies suggest that second generation Muslim may base their religious identity more on spiritual issues than on the practices imposed by Islam (Skandrani, Taïeb, & Moro, 2012). In this sense, the development of a “symbolic religiosity” (Gans, 1994) may be understood as a way to cope with Western society’s expectations of a more secularized next generation.

Studies have also shown that the perception of widespread anti-Islamic sentiments in the countries where they live may lead Muslim second generation to express a “reactive religiosity” (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2012). This implies a reaffirmation of Islamic identity and practices, resulting in a dis-identification from their national birth group in response to perceived discrimination (Fleischmann, Phalet, & Klein 2011).

To summarize, the communities to which people attach meaning provide the setting for identity formation. The common values and norms shared in such communities form the frame within which people negotiate the cross-cultural contentions to which they are exposed. This is particularly true for immigrant populations that need to cope with cultural and religious models sometimes very different from the mainstream context where they live, especially for Muslims in Christian countries (Gattino et al., 2016). The various forms religious identity can take in young Muslim immigrants have been described (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2012); our aim was to examine the interrelation between community belonging and the way of being Muslim.

In the present study we interviewed **second generation** Moroccan Muslims living in Italy and focused on how different contexts of relational and contextual belonging (e.g., family, networks, territorial, ethnic, cultural, religious) can contribute to identity definition. Our starting point was the relationship between belongingness and identity as posited by SIT (Tajfel, 1981); we used an ecological perspective to analyse the interconnections between identity and membership by situating them in a specific sociocultural and relational context. This approach is based on the assumption that a person-environment interdependence (Trickett, 2009) constitutes a fundamental condition for gaining specific knowledge about complex relationships and for generating salient results.

## **Current study**



The present study is part of wider research into the relationship between communities of belonging that immigrants of different ethnic origin recognize as relevant for them and their acculturation process (Buckingham et al., 2018; Fedi et al., 2019). Here, we focused our attention on the religious dimension that emerged spontaneously from the interviews, though this was not the main theme of the survey. Religious issues were not specifically addressed in the interview track. The aim of the present study was to explore in a sample of young adult second generation Muslim Moroccans the relationship between their conception of religion and community of reference, i.e., the community that they felt was most important for them and to which they felt they belonged. Furthermore, given the interdependence between personal and contextual dimensions, we focused on how the link between the conception of Islam and the community of belonging was interconnected with the definition of one's own identity.

Our guiding research questions were: 1) Which communities do the interviewees feel are most relevant for them? 2) What is the relationship between these communities and the meaning these young Moroccans attribute to religion? In detail, does a relationship exist between the kind of community they identify as being most important for them and their attitude toward Islam conceived as a system of values rather than a set of traditional practices? 3) Is the relationship between the most important community and the conception of religion intertwined with the definition of an individual's identities?

## Method

### Participants

We carried out the study in Turin (pop. approx. 900,000 inhabitants, northwest Italy), which ranks third by number of resident immigrants among Italy's major cities. Immigrants made up 15.1% of the resident population as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 (ISTAT 2018). The study sample was 20 unmarried, young adult Moroccans (10 M; 10 F, mean age 20.9 years, range 18-27  $\pm$  standard deviation [SD] 2.29). Fourteen were born in Italy and 6 arrived before the age of 6. All were university students, except for one who worked as a mechanic and had a middle school degree. Eight interviewees had Italian and 12 had Moroccan citizenship. Following Rumbaut (2004) and for the sake of brevity, all are hereafter referred to as second generation (2G).

### Data collection

We used a qualitative method to explore how the interviewees perceived the relationship between their concept of religion, identity, and most important community. **This** method enabled us to understand the sense and the subjective point of view of the interviewees, without rigid **preconceived** hypotheses. Also, we applied the method as a means to explore the interpretation provided by the interviewees themselves. The value of the biographical data collected in so doing is that it is not only of a personal nature but is connected with the local and general community to which **an** individual belongs.

Participants were recruited from the researchers' personal contacts and from public settings (e.g., schools, parks, markets); they provided advice on approaching new contacts and so assisted in involving additional participants for the study. They were informed about the purpose and procedures ~~of the study~~. An oral and written confidentiality statement to safeguard personal information was obtained from all participants. They were engaged in a 1-1.5-hour in-person interview. For their voluntary participation, they received a complimentary gift of appreciation (e.g., a pencil or a shopping bag). For privacy reasons, all interviewees are hereafter identified by pseudonyms. The study protocol was approved by the Ethic Committee of the University of Turin. The interviews were carried out in Italian by trained interviewers using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview questions focused on family history of immigration, relationships with receiving community members, the characteristics of the communities they mentioned as their most important and their acculturation experience. **Demographics** collected at the beginning of the interview included the community they considered most important and their religious status (which religion they practiced, if any, and how important they felt religion is for them).

## Data analysis

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and underwent qualitative content analysis using Atlas.Ti software (Muh, 1997). We adopted a collaborative approach and an open and axial coding method to generate iterative thematic categories (Olson, McAllister, Grinnell, Walters, & Appunn, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Each member of the research staff actively involved in this phase independently coded the assigned interviews; we **then** exchanged the coded interviews among the team members **to check for the use of codes**. ~~Controversial cases~~ were examined and discussed collectively to agree on final coding.

A total of 58 codes were created (coding a total of 1571 quotations) for text analysis. Consistent with the purpose of this study, we focused only on the following codes: the Most Important Community (MIC; references to the community the interviewees felt was most important; first part

of the interview; 190 quotations), Religion (references to religious aspects of life, to religious values and beliefs, 186 quotations), Ethnicity (references to ethnic origin and/or belonging, 280 quotations), and Self-identification (references to personal and social identity and identification, 86 quotations).

## Results

### Which community and which meaning?

Our analyses started with answers to the question “Which is your most important community?” Table 1 presents the five communities the interviewees felt were most important for them. The labels refer to the features that predominantly characterized the community members. In two communities, the members were culturally homogeneous: the *Arab community* was prevalently composed of members from the ethnic community, whilst the *Italian community* was mainly composed of members from the national (Italian) group. The members of the *Mixed* and the *Multiple* communities had multiple cultural backgrounds. We defined Mixed communities as a unique multi-ethnic community and Multiple Communities as the presence of multiple yet distinct communities having equal relevance for the member’s life. Finally, the label *Islamic community* defines the interviewees who indicated the religious community as the one most relevant for them.

INSERT Table 1 ABOUT HERE

Overall, a description of communities as relational spaces clearly emerged when the interviewees gave their reasons for a sense of belonging. The relational basis for belonging to the Arab Community included sharing a common cultural background that allows people to understand each other easily. As noted by Ayman (Arab Community, M, 21): “*If I have a problem, I talk about it first with an Arab friend of mine rather than an Italian one. I think he can understand me more because maybe we have the same point of view on things*”. Conversely, the basis for belonging to the Italian Community encompasses the larger societal context in which the second generation have grown up and with which they identify. As Achraf (Italian Community, M, 19) stated, “*Many friends of mine have grown up here in Italy like me; they are not Italian by law but they feel Italian*”. Accordingly, belonging to the national community does not overlap with assimilation because heritage – *my Moroccaness* said Kamar – is acknowledged as a relevant aspect of the sense of self:

There are things in the Italian community that I like so much, like the way of talking, the way of life, etc. However, I believe I never will give up my traditions because they are part of me... If I give them up I will be lost, I wouldn't be me (Kamar, Italian Community, F, 21).

The relevance of the relational context is further underscored by the interviewees who stated that Mixed Communities or Multiple Communities ~~was~~ their most important, i.e., communities that comprise members from different ethnic backgrounds. For Mixed Communities members, the basis of community belonging was the feeling that members can rely on each other, as Youssef (Mixed Communities, M, 27) expressed: *"Community for me is somebody to talk to, someone you can trust, and you help each other"*. The common bonds extend beyond ethnicity to include shared values: *"My community, the people that are around me, they surely have an ethic that should be similar to mine"* (Amine, Mixed Communities, M, 21). In a slightly different manner, Multiple Communities membership seemed to be based on proximity and daily life experiences: *"My community it's me, my friends at the university, who are people like me, that is, Moroccans living in Italy or Italians who went to school with me, my neighbours, my family of course"* (Sara, Multiple Communities, F, 22).

Finally, the basis of the Islamic Community is the commonality of religious faith. This community is composed of *"All the people sharing the Muslim faith"* (Sonia, Islamic Community, F, 23) and grounded on shared values and daily practices: *"We all share the same principles... the same way of life"* (Anfasse, Islamic Community, F, 21). In this community, religion assumed a pan-ethnic significance that represents a superordinate and unifying category of belonging, as Anfasse (Islamic Community, F, 21) stated: *"The Muslim community is not composed of Moroccan people only. There are Italians too, there are Tunisians..."*.

### **Religion, communities, and identities: traditional and symbolic understandings in relation to an individual's relational spaces**

As reported in previous research (Peek, 2005), common to our interviewees was their almost unanimous self-definition as practicing Muslims who follow the five pillars of Islam in their daily life (i.e., prayer, fasting, profession of faith, almsgiving, and pilgrimage). It comes as no surprise that religion emerged as a core issue, regardless of which community the interviewees stated they felt was the most important. *"My community is more bound by religion"* Jamal (Arab Community, M, 24) said, ~~while~~ Sara (Multiple Communities, F, 22) stated, *"Religion binds so much, so you feel like a brother, I call 'aunt' all the women"*.

Religion provides a guiding light in life to establish meaningful relationships: *“Religion must give an ethic, it must give a way of respecting others”* (Achraf, Italian Community, M, 19).

Because of its centrality, religion may display different facets when understood as a common set of traditions and practices rather than as a set of spiritual and moral values. We found examples of the former among the interviewees who referred to Arab Community and Mixed Communities. For them, religion overlapped with the perpetuation of traditional practices that are also a way to create the conditions that strengthen significant social relationships: *“(in my community) many times the meetings are linked to religious occasions, to the feasts, to the birth of the Prophet”* (Somaia, Arab Communities, F, 20). In other words, religious traditions mainly offer a source of mutual recognition. *“There are always traditions that relate to religion, and I respect them”* (Hamid, Mixed Communities, M, 24); respecting them means respecting family ties, despite the perception of a difficult balance between religious rules and actual daily practices:

My parents have been here a long time, however, there are traditions to respect, which cannot be applied to reality but which have to be respected by religion and because my parents care a lot about religion. They taught it to us (Idriss, Mixed Communities, M, 20).

Arab Community and Mixed Communities members seemed to agree in understanding religion as a part of their ethnic heritage **that is** passed on to them. Some differences emerged in the meaning they attributed to ethnic identity, however. The Arab Community members conceived ethnicity as strength of identity:

I think [ethnic identity] it's very important because it's a part of you, anyway, if you want it or not, it can be seen somehow [...] at the level of your identity you don't feel lost. If you act the Italian person and pretend not to bother about having another culture you belong to, at a certain point in your life you will feel lost, so it's good to have both [ethnic and Italian] (Somaia, Arab Community, F, 20).

Differently, the Mixed Community members described how they had to strike a delicate balance between respect for traditions and participation in society: *“I need to balance between family and friends, because I come from a Muslim family, so I need to balance these two realities”* (Idriss, Mixed Communities, M, 20). This may lead to “fatigue of integration” in agreement with Nadia

(Mixed Communities, F, 20) when she said: “*I cannot say I feel 100% Italian. There’s that little piece of ‘stangership’ that animates me*”.

The interviewees who felt that the Multiple Communities or the Italian Community was their most important community shared a conception of religion as being a spiritual drive transcending daily practices. Understanding religion in spiritual terms means to conceive of it as a guide that orients behaviour because of the values it expresses. This conception transforms religion into a set of values rather than a set of practices, in which people recognize themselves as being faithful even if they do not follow the traditional behavioural norms:

I am religious but I don’t wear the veil. I’m a practicing Muslim [...] because I believe a lot [...] I believe a lot as way of thinking, of understanding life: I’m very religious, but I find it hard to follow the religious dogma (Sara, Multiple Communities, F, 22)

Moreover, to strip religion of its rituals of daily practice may help to make better sense of one’s own religiousness and place it on a more secular basis, thus facilitating the believer’s equal participation in a plural society. In these terms, embracing religion for its values rather than its practices may be a way to cope with the stereotyped view of Islam by Western society:

To accept the values of Islam implies to accept the other beliefs and make yourself as smooth as possible: this is my idea of religion. Unfortunately, my religion has always been associated with negative behaviours and attitudes that are not part of Islam. Because Islam by itself means peace (Achraf, Italian Community, M, 19).

Within this frame, traditional religious practices are likely to be understood as **a** result of historical processes that can be reframed. For a 2G belonging to the Multiple Communities, traditions can be rebuilt starting from a renewed and subjective way of being Muslim. In other words, the superordinate national identity ‘situates’ religious and ethnic identity: “*Living as Muslims but contextualized in Italy, that is, we are in Italy, we are Italian, we feel Italian, rather... let’s feed this [Islamic] spirit*” (Nayura, Multiple Communities, F, 20).

In a similar way, the interviewees who referred to the Italian community understood the relevance of their heritage **as** a re-elaboration of their identity:

My cultural identity is important because it’s a part of me [...] that forms the substrate of the person that I am now [...] It’s a Cartesian system, it gives you some

coordinates, it lets you move [...] so you don't feel disoriented [...] the fact that your identity is strong does not impede you from knowing a new identity [...] (Achraf, Italian Community, M, 19).

Unsurprisingly, religion conceived as spiritual guide was differentially nuanced among interviewees (Islamic Community) who identified the Islamic community as being their most important and regarded spirituality as the observation of religious precepts: “*Islam is not only a religion but is also a way of life*”, stated Anfasse (Islamic Community, F, 21), whilst Mina (Islamic Community, F, 22) added: “*We are here to respect the Islamic rules*”. For these two interviewees, adherence to behavioural norms was a way to testify to their spiritual commitment. The importance of testifying faith takes precedence over the risks of discrimination by the host society. When professed by women, testifying assumes an active role unlike the stereotype of the Muslim woman as a subordinate figure:

I said yes, I'll live in a way more complicated than now but I'm following my religion, because at the end, when I'm wearing the veil I am much more a messenger than a boy. Because when they [i.e., others] see me they immediately understand that I'm Muslim (Sonia, Islamic Community, F, 23).

The Islamic community shares ties of faith that originate in a superordinate pan-ethnic category comprising different feelings of belonging to a community. Islamic identity appeared to be superordinate to the other identities: “*I'm glad I was born here [in Italy] but having Arab origins. By respecting the Islamic community, I'm proud. I'm more proud of being Muslim than Moroccan: it's my landmark*” (Mina, Islamic Community, F, 22).

## Discussion

Our study investigated the interconnections between cultural elements, community belonging, and identity shaping in a group of young adult second generation Moroccans living in Italy. We addressed this issue from an ecological perspective by assuming the existence of a person-environment interdependence. According to this approach, people are constantly involved in a reciprocal process in which they exchange resources and social support in a complementarity perspective (Siporin, 1980; Mannarini et al., 2012). Community is the relational and the spatial location where these processes take place and where a person's identity is shaped both as an individual and as a group member.



On these bases and in line with previous work (Mannarini & Rochira, 2014; Mannarini et al., 2017; van Heelsum & Koomen, 2016), we referred to SIT (Tajfel, 1981) to conceptualize identification with one's own most important community and sense of religious belonging. The concept of religion itself has been defined by social identity (cf. Woodhead, 2011) and religious identity can be defined within SIT (Tajfel, 1981; see also Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Management of ethnic and religious identity is particularly complex for second generation Muslims and is worked out in very different conceptions of religiosity and expressions of everyday life (e.g., a system of values vs. a set of practices) (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012).

In this regard, all interviewees affirmed the importance of religion, irrespective of the community they participated in. They felt that religion was particularly relevant for them personally. All except one were university students. In general, improvement in educational level indicates structural integration of upcoming generations, i.e., "the incorporation of immigrants into the core institutions of the host society, such as the labour market or the educational system" (Wachter & Fleischmann, 2018; see also Heckmann, 2005). Among Muslim immigrants, educational level is negatively related to religiosity (see Güveli 2011). As Voas and Fleischmann (2012) have pointed out, however, the bulk of studies reporting lower religiosity among Muslim immigrants with higher education involved the first generation. This relationship was not found for the second generation, suggesting that "structural integration does not necessarily lead to lower levels of Muslim religious commitment in the West" (Voas and Fleischmann, 2012, p. 536). Nevertheless, despite their shared commitment to religion, their conceptions differed in relation to the community that the interviewees felt was most relevant for them.

For example, the interviewees who felt most closely attached to the Arab or the Mixed communities tended to express a conception of Islam based mainly on shared traditions and cultural practices. This way of intending religion is consistent with the *religious vitality* hypothesis (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2012) that predicts similar levels of religiosity between first and second generation because of socialization within immigrant families and communities. Studies on the first generation's desire to transmit their homeland religious values to the new generations born in Christian, highly secularized countries (Ebaugh & Chafetz 2000; Voas & Fleischmann, 2012) reported an even stronger association between ethnic and religious identity in the second than in the first generation (Maliepaard, Lubbers & Gijsberts, 2010). Our Arab Community and Mixed Communities interviewees expressed a strong ethnic identity in which religion appeared to be one of the cultural components.

Differently, second generation Moroccans expressing their sense of belonging to the Islamic community found in the superordinate transcendent dimension a reference point for their identity;



this encompasses other dimensions of social identity, allowing individuals of different ethnicities to identify in a common faith. These interviewees conceived traditional religious practices as the primary way to express the values and the meanings of their faith, like two sides of the same coin. We can assume that such religious vitality may express a *reactive religiosity*, leading to reaffirmation of an Islamic identity through adherence to religious precepts (Fleishmann & Phalet, 2012). As our female interviewees noted, wearing the headscarf puts women at the front line of discrimination since it places on them both the honour and the burden of testifying their faith (Peek, 2005). This observation is shared by other findings on Muslim women residing in Western countries (cf. Ajrouch, 2007; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Zimmerman, 2015), and **it** is particularly significant for two interrelated reasons. The increased adoption of wearing the headscarf among Muslim girls can be interpreted as a response of reactive religiosity to the growing discrimination against Muslims in the West (Haddad 2007; Peek, 2005). Furthermore, it affirms a women's agency and personal choice that contrasts with the general stereotypical understanding of subordination. As emerged from a French study (Amina, 2004 reported in Zimmerman, 2015, p. 147), wearing the veil by educated young Muslim "takes an intellectual meaning that embraces feminism and that allows young Muslim women to affirm their identity vis-à-vis French society, the Muslim community, and their family" in a way that seems coherent with endorsement of the Western value of intellectual autonomy (Schwartz & Ros, 1995). On this point, we agree with Zimmerman (2019, p. 157) that findings "on young Arab Muslim women's agency illustrate the importance **of considering** alternative approaches to dominant discourse on women's rights".

Finally, the interviewees who felt attached to the Italian community or the Multiple communities expressed a *symbolic* conception of religion. For them, the values and precepts of a religion should be interpreted on personal and symbolic terms, without the obligation to follow traditional practices. A symbolic approach averts the cultural clash (van Heelsum & Koomen, 2016) and creates the basis for a pacific coexistence of different religious traditions in a common multicultural space. This attitude seems consistent with ethnographic studies that report a second generation's attempt to create a "cultureless Islam" (Chen, 2008; see also Voas & Fleishmann, 2012), i.e., an Islam separated from ethnic parental heritage. Although identity is rooted in ethnicity, it is also open to enrichment through the encounter with other cultural traditions.

Overall, the variety of responses sheds light on the complexity and circularity of the process of linking community belonging, religion, and identity. Our findings underline the multifaceted nature of community as a relational and sociocultural space where person-environment interdependence takes places (Trickett, 2009). The ecological approach allowed us to explore the interconnections between identity and membership in a broader perspective that embraces the relationships that

individuals and communities have with society. In this perspective, our findings contrast with the widespread idea of an “irreducible difference” between Islam and the Western world and the “impossible integration” of Muslim immigrants (Perocco, 2008). A variety of interconnections between community belonging and identity emerged from the interviews, but the one common strand was the interviewees’ willingness to find a way to make integration successful. Integration relies on a sense of responsibility for their role in the society in which they participate and signals the accomplishment of their parents’ migration projects and efforts (Zimmerman, 2015). The active role of these young **second generation** in their environment has relevant implications for policies that reduce a socio-political climate of tension, especially among young Muslims, which may ultimately foster their integration in a pluralistic society.

These strengths notwithstanding, our study has several limitations that may be addressed in future research. The first is the sample size and characteristics. The sample was quite small ( $N = 20$ ); though such a size is not uncommon in qualitative research, a larger sample would have strengthened our findings. The second is that the sample included only young adult Moroccans with a high educational level and not yet entirely part of the labour market. Further research with samples composed of different ethnic origin and educational level may be equipped to analyse the interconnections that have emerged here to reinforce these preliminary findings. Because our study adopted an emic perspective with the aim to deepen our understanding of local dynamics, generalization of the results was not one of the aims of the study. Moreover, a longitudinal approach could further our understanding of how the relationships between community belongings and identities evolve over a lifetime. Finally, the original study focused primarily on the relationship between the sense of community belonging and acculturation and not on religious identity. Our findings stem from spontaneous responses by the interviewees and were not elicited in answer to questions on this issue. This may be a limitation of the study since the topic was not further analysed; nevertheless, it discloses the relevance of religion in the construction of **second generation** identity.

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